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ABSTRACT

Student-generated materials are a means by which students may be brought into the role of active participant in their own second language learning processes. To create their own materials, students can engage in the following types of activities: (1) performance, or those in which the student prepares and delivers a message to the group (e.g., student speeches in which peer and self-evaluation play a significant part); (2) participation, in which the student engages in some communicative activity in a natural setting (e.g., spontaneous conversation or interview with a native speaker); and (3) observation, in which the student observes and/or records linguistic interactions between two or more native or fluent speakers of the target language (e.g., analysis of greeting behaviors). These three activity types offer a wide range of possibilities and flexible applications for intermediate to advanced language learning. Student-generated materials can provide a rich and practical way to meet the goal of interaction and the need for real communicative tasks, and to encourage students to be their own teachers. (MSE)

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Tapping a Vital Resource: Student-Generated Materials

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TAPPING A VITAL RESOURCE: STUDENT-GENERATED MATERIALS

Heidi Rigganbach

INTRODUCTION

Reviews of the last two decades of language teaching have revealed that dramatic changes have taken place (Morley, 1987; Richards, 1987). Called "communicatively-oriented curriculums" by some, or the "proficiency movement" by others (Higgs, 1984; Mohan, 1985), there is little doubt now that these developments have radically changed the directions of both language research and language education programmes. Although there are many aspects to this new "paradigm" in the field of language teaching, few would argue that a main feature is the greater stress on learner interaction, and thus a focus on the learners as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of a teacher's lessons.

In a study on interaction in the classroom, Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) suggest that there are two different kinds of linguistic environment available to second language learners: one characterized by input that has been modified or simplified -- such as that found in the more traditional "teacher-fronted" classroom, and the other characterized by opportunities for interaction. Their study shows support for the assertion that the second linguistic environment is more beneficial for the learner, since, in this setting, both speakers focus on the immediate task of communication itself in "real time", and work together to achieve mutual understanding, modifying their language according to the demands of the situation. In addition, interactive-type activities seem to address the issue of student "comfort" as a factor in second language learning. Some research suggests that interactive group work lessens many students' anxiety about performing and lowers their "affective filters", facilitating learning (Gaies, 1986; Long and Porter, 1985; Pica and Doughty, 1985; Doughty and Pica, 1986).

Some language teaching programmes provide opportunities for students to interact -- through role plays, conversation games, group and peer work. To support this, a wealth of materials are now available which attempt to provide frameworks and suggestions for such activities -- such as texts of guided discussion topics, etc. Although these are a major improvement over the "teacher-centered" materials available in the past, it is sometimes tempting to overlook a

rich and practical resource that is available for free: student-generated materials.

Student-generated materials are a means by which students may be brought into the role of active participant in their own language learning processes. Students create their own materials in a sense: they produce their own language "data" or they observe language in action; they collect these data by means of audiotape, videotape or detailed field notes; they analyze these materials and use them as a basis for discussion and other class activities; and, in the process, they develop a greater appreciation of the subtlety and nuance of linguistic interaction, and learn some of the skills necessary to shape and motivate their own language learning progress.

The arguments in favor of students designing materials and, as much as possible, carrying out their own language learning programme seem mostly self-evident. From a commonsense point of view, many people would agree that one's own experiences and tools are more interesting, memorable, and relevant than those which are second-hand or provided. Secondly, while some prepared materials which use interactive-type tasks promote a kind of "planned spontaneity", student-generated materials often necessitate real spontaneity and thus provide confidence in students that they can function in such spontaneous situations. Another advantage to student-generated materials is their practicality -- they are, like "real life", available for free; few resources outside the student's own are necessary, which may be especially suitable in areas such as Southeast Asia where current materials are expensive or not readily available. Lastly, involving the students in the process of language learning is a good way to motivate them to continue it on their own, after they leave the classroom environment.

Relevant to this is what Hatch, Flashner, and Hunt (1986) have called the "experience model" of second language acquisition. Briefly, it is their claim that "language clarifies and organizes experience, and conversely that language grows out of experience". Accordingly, activities which "activate the system for discovery of the new" should be implemented in the classroom. In other words, these authors suggest that language learners should be encouraged to become their own researchers in order to obtain first-hand experience with language. In a sense, these researchers and others (eg Heath, 1986) suggest that every student of a second language can become an applied linguist interested in the language acquisition process itself.

STUDENT-GENERATED MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

This paper, motivated in part by the "experience model" described above, will introduce and briefly describe some of the techniques whereby students may

collect and use their own materials for use in (and out of) the classroom, thus bringing themselves into a more participatory role. Rather than assuming the more traditional role of passive recipient of their instructor's "teaching", these activities require students to generate their own materials -- particularly in the skill areas of speaking and listening.

Of course, the idea behind these types of activities is not necessarily new -- the teaching of writing, for instance, has always depended on activities where students draw from their own experiences and even, sometimes, use their own work to learn editing techniques. (Rarely, however, do such "follow-up" sessions require that the student take a critical and objective view of his or her own language learning processes.) But, with the advent of audio and video recorders, it is now possible to extend the type of self-monitoring that has always been available in writing to the skill areas of speaking and listening.

For the sake of simplicity, the activities described here will be organized into three distinct "types": performance activities, participation activities and observation activities. Each kind of activity will be described and then examples will be given of some of the more successful and interesting activities from each type.

1. PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

"Performance" activities, the type most familiar to the current generation of second language teachers in this region, are those in which the student prepares beforehand and delivers a message to a group. A good example of such an activity is the student speech. However, the typical speech activity used in an oral communication class cannot be considered "material". In the usual classroom setting, students deliver a speech and the teacher gives feedback, often using an evaluation form. By the time the feedback reaches the student, usually the details about the performance have been forgotten. The activities suggested here can make the student speech useful as material for students to learn more about their language, but more is required than one-time student performance and teacher evaluation of errors and other features.

One first step is peer evaluation. Peer evaluation can be a useful component of oral performance activities since:

1. the "audience" becomes involved in such a way that students, as members of the audience, become more than simply passive listeners;
2. the evaluation process helps students to gain confidence in their own ability to evaluate language; and
3. the evaluation activity itself becomes an opportunity for real, spontaneous interaction since the "message" (the evaluation) is important to the student performer.

One technique in peer evaluation of oral materials is for the teacher to select beforehand two students to formally evaluate another student's performance; a special motivation for these evaluators is for the instructor to grade them on their evaluations. The evaluators begin by taking notes on the content of the student's speech, briefly outlining the main points and thereby demonstrating their ability (or lack of ability) to follow the student's speech.

Immediately following the speech, it can be constructive if the two evaluators orally sum up, before the rest of the class, their reactions to the performance. This can be done efficiently if their remarks are limited to two comments -- one on a positive and effective aspect of the speech, and one on an area that needs work. This helps the student who has performed to get some immediate, balanced feedback on the performance and also gives the rest of the audience some perspective concerning the important features of successful speech-giving.

Finally, the evaluators fill out the evaluation sheet in some detail for the presenter to read and consider. This evaluation sheet, drawn up by the teacher beforehand, can be the same as the teacher's. Its purpose is to structure the evaluation so that it meets the goals of the activity, with categories for such criteria as **CONTENT** (Is it focused? clear? original?), **ORGANIZATION** (Is it logical? Are there appropriate transitions?), and **DELIVERY** (Is eye contact maintained? Are notes relied on too much? Is the volume adequate, etc.) Other comments would relate to the focus of the particular assignment, and could include specific grammar or vocabulary points.

Another way to use the student speech as "material" is to audio- or videotape the students during their initial performances and allow them to evaluate themselves. With self-evaluation, students listen to or watch their recorded speeches and evaluate themselves according to the same criteria as the teacher and peer evaluators use. This can be especially illuminating for the students, who are usually unused to hearing themselves (or seeing themselves on videotape). Next, the student performers select a portion of their talk and transcribe it in detail (complete with hesitations, filled pauses -- "uh"s -- and grammatical errors). Where in their initial performance they focused on communication, in the follow-up they focus on their problems and nonnative-like features, considering ways to restructure the piece so that it would be more effective.

Although not discussed in detail here, student-designed role-plays and student-written dramas, if publicly performed, can also function as "Performance Activities" (see Peck, 1987 for a good discussion of how role-plays were successfully implemented in a course for social workers). All such structured performance activities can use "new" techniques such as peer evaluation, audiotaping, transcription and self-evaluation, and thus can serve as an introduction to the less traditional participation activities discussed below.

2. PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES

"Participation" activities can be some of the most diverse and interesting of student-generated materials, and can serve as the basis for a whole course by themselves. These are activities where the student participates in some communicative activity in a "natural setting". For example, in an oral communication course, students are required to audiotape a spontaneous conversation with a native speaker of their choice. (If access to a native speaker is difficult, the alternative is to find a partner who is considered "fluent" -- someone who has studied or spent time abroad, for example. If even this is difficult, students can converse with the most advanced language students.) The goal of these conversations is for the student to obtain "data" that is as natural and spontaneous as possible given the constraints of the recording procedure.

Once the conversation is recorded the students transcribe, on their own, an excerpt of the conversation that they find interesting. Transcription, an important element of many student-generated materials and activities, allows the transcriber to focus on details -- a valuable exercise in listening comprehension, as well as an opportunity to heighten awareness of the students' own difficulties of expression. In the process of transcribing, students discover much about natural language that is difficult to teach -- that native speakers also make "mistakes": they hesitate, rephrase, pause, mispronounce words, etc. Finally, the transcription process makes materials available in a written form for the class to use as a basis for many further activities.

Once the initial conversation data is audiotaped and transcribed, there are many options for activities based on it. One use of the material is for vocabulary-building. The student notes down unfamiliar words or idioms in the native or fluent speaker's language, and also targets areas in his or her own speech where there was some difficulty in achieving clear communication. With the leisure of hindsight, the student can set about discovering how the message could have been presented in a clearer or more accurate manner. (See Sample A, below, for an example of this activity.)

Another possibility is for the student to concentrate on the native speaker's speech and to note effective or interesting usage. With the aid of a transcript and the heightened awareness of detail brought about by the transcription process, students can focus on details which are difficult or impossible to catch during the actual conversation itself.

Finally, this procedure can be used as an exercise in discovering regularities of conversation strategies, such as topic control, "attendance" markers, or specific "gambits" (such as how to appropriately disagree, register surprise or sympathy, etc). In a US context, for example, one conversation strategy that commonly needs to be addressed is how to "interrupt" appropriately.

All of these topics can be independently pursued by the students in the form of a language learning journal (eg Bailey 1986), small-group discussions, or student-created role plays. Or, alternatively, the teacher may listen to the tapes or read the transcripts, select a particularly successful example of the feature under study, and, with the student's approval, use the sample as a focus for discussion.

SAMPLE A

Conversation Excerpt (Student Transcript)

Student Comments
(Activity: Focus on
Accuracy of Expression)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>NNS: And, and how about, do you have any <u>brother</u> or <u>sister</u>?</p> | <p>(should be plural)</p> |
| <p>NS : Yes, I have four brothers in Chicago.
I'm from Chicago.</p> | |
| <p>NNS: Uh-hn, four brothers all older than you?</p> | |
| <p>NS : One older and three younger.</p> | |
| <p>NNS: Uh-mm..do you, do you think it's interesting to live in a family.. umm <u>just have</u> brothers and no sisters?</p> | <p>(should be "that no just has"?)</p> |
| <p>NS : Oh. I never lived in a family with sisters (laugh) so I don't know how to compair it. (laugh) Ya. I think <u>I was wanna to have</u> a sister, but I didn't have one, so, I don't know, but I would like to know.</p> | <p>(my mistake? = "I was wanting" or "always wanted"?)
(should be + s)</p> |
| <p>NNS: Do your <u>brother</u>..um all take care of you?</p> | |
| <p>NS : (laugh) No, this is not in America.</p> | |
| <p>NNS: Oh, but...(wait) Sometimes in Taiwan if you have <u>many many, so so many</u> brothers in a family, then you might be more...dependent, because your brother, your brothers (laugh) always will take care of you, and you don't have to worry about many things, <u>so...</u></p> | <p>(sound funny! repeated too much)</p> |
| <p>NS : Do you like that way?</p> | <p>(should say "because they can help you in many ways" I did not finish!)</p> |

Another participation activity that elicits enthusiastic student response is the interview. This activity, if properly prepared, is ideal for "activating the discovery of the new" so essential to learning. In it, the students become their own historians, interviewing their acquaintances or relatives about some meaningful or memorable aspect of their lives (see Spradley 1979, Terkel 1974). the most successful of these projects seems to involve subjects whose experiences are different in some important way from the student (eg; interview the oldest person you know, interview someone you know who doesn't "fit in". In Malaysia, for example, highly successful student interviews have centered around experiences of the Japanese occupation of Malaysia during World War II, descriptions of village life in East Malaysia, etc.

In the interview exercise, follow-up activities can be similar to those used for the student-gathered conversations, but here other alternatives are available: students can be asked to retell or report the story in their own words, or use the activity as a basis to begin thinking about the difference between spoken and written discourse. In the Malaysian project, for example, students collected English-language narratives by speakers who were not necessarily fluent, transcribed them, noted the typicalities of spoken speech (the repetitions, the Straits-English use of "lah", the hesitations, restarts, etc). They then rewrote the spoken narrative into a written one, changing the vocabulary and sentence structure where appropriate, eliminating most of the features typical of "spoken" language, etc. The best of these written versions were then "performed" by being read aloud alongside the spoken one to note the differences. (See Sample B next page).

SAMPLE B

Interview - Spoken Version (Student transcript)

Abah's Story

Ooo... That time life very hard. Abah was still very young... Abah had to work. That time Abah became a coolie. Abah only thirteen years old. Abah start work at eight o'clock. Abah finish five o'clock. Stop for lunch at twelve. That time Abah eat boiled sweet potato with coffee-o [local expression for plain coffee without milk]. (Gives a little laugh.) That time Abah made sweet-potato buns for Chinese towkay.

That time Abah was paid Japanese money. When the Japanese surrendered, the money not acceptable anymore...when the whites come back. That time (...with regrets in his expressive voice) clever folks, they buy white-man money. Paid thousand thousand. Stupid folks sold all their white man mornny. That time Abah also stupid. Abah sold also...(another little laugh)...not all. But when white man..when white man come back all the money no use. No money, very hard to eat.

Interview - Witten Version (Student edited)

Abah's Story

During the Japanese Occupation in Malaya from 1941-45, life was very difficult for me. Even though I was only thirteen years old, I had to work at a coolie job. This job was far from my home, and every day I had to walk a long distance. I started at 8.00 am and finished at 5.00 with a short lunch break always the same thing -- boiled sweet potato and coffee without milk.

I was paid in Japanese money, and when the Japanese surrendered, the whites returned. Before the surrender, many of the clever people paid great prices for the we called "white-man money", money that could be used in Europe and abroad. The simple Malay people sold all of their white man money, and when the whites came back, they had no money to use. I too was stupid and sold most, but not all, of my money. It was difficult since if you had no money you could not buy food for eating.

Two other participation activities deserve to be mentioned. One is the discussion-leading activity, where students: 1) select a topic, 2) find a short background article or write a summary of the topic, 3) draw up a list of questions for consideration by the rest of the class, and finally, 4) lead a semi-formal class discussion on the topic, with a prepared introduction and a spontaneous summing-up conclusion. Some of the same evaluation techniques discussed above can be used for this activity (peer evaluation, audio- or video-taping, and detailed self evaluation with the aid of the student transcription). Certainly too, this activity provides an excellent opportunity to look at the dynamics of turn-taking and topic control.

A final participation activity that has been used successfully is the "oral dialogue journal", where students speak spontaneously on an audiotape on a given topic, such as a response to an assigned article or essay, or on anything of interest (much like a written journal). With this activity it is the teacher who is the other "participant", and who responds to the student orally, via audiotape. This teacher response would primarily focus on content, thus creating a real dialogue, but could also touch on linguistic factors of the student's speech, such as fluency, pronunciation and grammar. When there is limited access to native speakers, this activity can be particularly effective as an opportunity for students to interact with and obtain exposure to native or fluent speakers.

3. OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES

These are activities in which a student observes and/or records linguistic interactions between two or more native or fluent speakers of the target language. This technique is useful for building student appreciation and awareness of language as it is actually used in the real world, and since the student is taking the role of non-participant observer, he or she is free to concentrate on the subject at hand without fear of performance errors.

A typical observation assignment, in an area where native speakers are plentiful, might be to assign two students, as a team, the responsibility for exploring how native speakers negotiate a certain social situation. For example, in a course dealing with conversation strategies, the focus of an assignment might be on greeting behavior. There are many such possibilities which can also serve as the focus for this assignment; almost any communicative task that is addressed in a language classroom can be observed in its "native habitat" -- whether it be how or when people greet each other, make requests, interrupt each other, thank each other, compliment one another, disagree, or receive compliments.

After a brief in-class discussion on field observation techniques (Spradley 1980), the students select a site, carry out their observations, and take detailed field notes in the manner of an ethnographic researcher or anthropologist. After

observing a certain number of cases, the students write a brief summary and present these findings to the class. Alternatively, a follow-up activity could be a performance, in which the students create a role play which demonstrates the nonverbal and verbal behavior appropriate to the particular conversational strategy under analysis.

As in the conversation task described above, observation activities have the drawback of assuming access to a pool of native speakers. For purposes of observation, this problem may be partially alleviated by making use of native English speakers on radio and television, especially in "natural" settings, such as unrehearsed interviews.

Also, if native speakers are not available in large numbers, some of the same results may be achieved through the use of elicitation techniques, in which students ask native or fluent speakers to draw upon their intuitions about acceptable native-like behaviour in a given circumstance (eg Hawkins, 1985). In this case, the students and/or teacher would propose a hypothetical situation. For example, in the study of "complaints", a basis for elicitation might be the following:

"Let's say you just bought a train ticket but found out that the date on the ticket is not the date you had requested. Even though you know you're not allowed to exchange tickets once they are purchased, you feel that, in this case, it is the ticket-seller's mistake, not yours. What would you say?"

The students would "collect the data" -- the native or fluent speakers' responses -- either by recording them on a tape recorder or by taking detailed notes.

The same type of follow-up activity could be assigned here as well: students could simply list the conversation strategies (or "gambits") most often used (eg, "I'm sorry but...", "I'm afraid you made a mistake.", "Excuse me, but it's important that you know that...", etc). As with the first observation activity, students often become interested in the sociolinguistic variance they observe in the different responses. For example, if they present their results in the form of role play before the rest of the class, discussions are likely to arise concerning which conversation strategies appear to be most "native-like", which ones might be effective with certain age groups, which ones would be used only in very formal or informal situations, etc.

CONCLUSION

Although the above list of activities is certainly not exhaustive, it should be clear that many opportunities exist for implementing student-generated materi-

als in the classroom. Such activities should not, of course, be inserted at random into an existing curriculum -- a certain amount of "structuring" (Richards and Rodgers 1987:53) is necessary to ensure a careful match of student needs, programme goals, syllabus design, and course objectives.

Because of the wide range and flexible applicability of the activities described here, it should be possible to adapt them to fit the most diverse intermediate to higher level student populations. The "interview" task -- to take just one example -- could be modified to fit a writing course organized around rhetorical modes (where the transformation from an oral to a written version could be used to teach strategies of narration); the same task might be used in a listening comprehension course whose materials are the actual interviews gathered by the other students. In a speaking course, the interview task might be modified to concentrate on interviewing and conversational "feedback" techniques, to stress the difference between oral and written language, as well as to provide fruitful material for classroom discussions, based on the content of the interviews.

As language teaching proceeds to a more mature grounding in language theory, it is expected that an even greater emphasis will be placed on the value of interactive input, the necessity of real communicative tasks, and the role of students as their own "teachers". Student-generated materials can offer a rich and practical way to meet these goals.

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